

Alice Walker's discovery of Womanist Zora Neale Hurston: Janie in
Their Eyes were Watching God

By

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the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

[Department of English and Humanities]

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Abstract

The paper will touch on Walker's quest for Zora Neale Hurston, learning about her grave to coming across her grave and most importantly her most notable work *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The thesis will focus on Hurston's text as a womanist one with reference to Alice Walker's Womanist prose collection *In Search of Our Mothers' Lost Gardens* and will look at Hurston's representation of black culture, traditions, communities and people through the protagonist Janie's surroundings. Added to that, Hurston's normalization of female sexuality, intellect along with her right of choice in case of her partners, quest for self hood, love and freedom even for a woman of colour through the portrayal of Janie would be emphasized. Consequently, the metaphorical meanings of 'Pear Tree', 'Road', 'Horizon', etc. along with Janie's growth from a girl to a woman through her experiences with her three husbands, her evolving way of living and thinking will all be looked at. Only the cumulative view of all these things can make us reach a better understanding of the Womanist protagonist, the text and the author herself to fill certain gaps in existing written materials and ponder about possibilities of further research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Women are the ones who bring life to the world, nourishing a fetus inside for nine months and keeps the human race growing. Yet, they are the ones who are marginalized and considered as “the other”. Woman as a concept is a social construction aimed controlling a group of people through relegating her to the lowest position of the society, justifying her victimization and defending all the discriminations that she is ideologically and structurally subjected to. Women in such societies are always oppressed and need to define themselves as someone’s daughter, wife, etc. i.e. identify themselves through another man in a patriarchal society and face discrimination; based on gender, colour, etc. Thus, no woman is free and the situation gets even worse for black women. In one of the fundamental feminist texts, “An Argument for Black Women’s Liberation as a Revolutionary Force” (1969), Mary Ann Weathers stated that women should initiate for their freedom because:

All women suffer oppression, even white women, particularly poor white women and especially Indian, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Oriental and black American women whose oppression is tripled as the others mentioned. But we do have female oppression in common. This means that we can begin to talk to other women with this common factor and start building links with them and thereby build and transform the revolutionary force we are now beginning to amass.

These lines show that how women are marginalized and considered as the other, in accordance to the Lacanian concept of “the self and the other”. In this context, the self is the male or most precisely white man who oppresses / control the other. Here woman is the other, who is discriminated against and this becomes easier to establish in the society through the discourse of myths and tales which help to shape realities for thousands of years. One example of such discourse

is the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, which shows man as the prime subject created by God and woman just as a part of him (Eve was created from Adam's rib) and is not even considered a single entity. Prime discourses like these make the gender discrimination easier and many aspire to fight and eradicate this discrimination such as the feminists, in the hope to create a better tomorrow. To understand the goals of feminists, being able to distinguish between the words female, feminine and feminist is very crucial. In Octavia Butler's view, female is related to biology of a woman and feminine is related to a social construction through which we are taught to play a particular role like an actor. In Tori Moi's opinion, being a feminist is having a political stand where there is no in between i.e. someone will either agree with the feminist movements, theories and criticisms or not. Feminism has nothing to do with the word feminine or any particular gender, it is just a series of movements which try to address certain issues and reduce these through three phases; the first wave, the second wave and the third wave feminism. The first wave emerged around the First World War to ensure political or voting rights for women, whereas the second wave addressed the issue of class discrimination and is even considered as a Marxist movement by many, while the third wave was more post structural approach and dealt with gender equality by viewing gender as a spectrum. Peter Barry divided these waves mainly into the British, American and French waves of feminist movements. Hence, the criticism that feminism fundamentally favored white women was not false. Even Alice Walker claimed these feminist movements to be ignoring and overlooking the rights of African-American women similar to her due to their race, roots, complexion, origin and history. Then she coined the term 'Womanist' in "Coming Apart" (1979) to speak about the rights of women of color. She thus began the first part of her womanist prose collection *In Search of Our Mothers' Lost Gardens* (1983) by one of Bernice Reagon's "Black Women and Liberation Movements" quote :

I came out of a tradition where those things are valued where you talk about a woman with big legs and big hips and black skin. I came out of a black community where it was alright to have hips and be heavy. You didn't feel that people didn't like you. The values that [imply] you must be skinny come from another culture....Those are not the values that I was given by the women who served as my models. I refuse to be judged by the values of another culture. I am a black woman and I will stand as best as I can in that imagery.

In these lines Walker clearly stands with the women of color and emphasizes on the aspect of 'white standards of beauty' which is not universally applicable and it is completely normal for women of different ethnicities, races, geographic regions to come in different shapes and sizes based on their genetics, culture, climate and own beauty standards. She refers to women who served as her 'models' and represented women who are mothers, grandmothers and women existing during and before her generation and talked about their 'gardens' which are lost or needed to be rediscovered. Gardens can be said to be their own mind, creativity, passion, emotion, substance and everything that made them able to live after enduring so much in the past. Their treasure; their mind, existence, opinions, were all either reduced to nothing or locked in a cage to never let out forever. Poet Jean Toomer worded his thoughts about them in such a way: "Black women whose spirituality was so intense, so deep, so unconscious, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they had" (Walker, pp.). Zora Neale Hurston was one such woman who was a famous figure during the Harlem Renaissance movement in the 1920s. Zora was an author and an anthropologist who used to incorporate regional and cultural realism in her novels, short stories and folklore collections. Although many black artists participating in these movements gained fame at that time, it was not easy for Hurston. Thus her reputation completely declined by the time of her death. Eventually her works were discovered by Alice Walker, the first black

woman Pulitzer Prize winner for her novel *The Color Purple*. Zora Neale Hurston had a profound impact on Walker. In her 1975 essay, “In Search of Zora Neale Hurston” found in the womanist prose collection compilation *In Search of Our Mothers’ Lost Gardens*, Walker wrote about Zora Neale Hurston and played a significant role to resurrect Hurston’s reputation as an important American literary figure. Walker further paid her “literary aunt” or “the grandmother she never had” a further tribute by purchasing a headstone for Hurston’s grave unmarked for a decade and inscribed the words, “a genius of the south” in Hurston’s tombstone which is very easily identified by visitors today. It was due to Walker’s rediscovery of Hurston and her works especially her most famous novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) that made people begin to read, study and appreciate her again. Hurston’s novel was a great one but it had faced contradictory or mixed reactions from the then audience because it was clearly way ahead of its time and the women of today still enjoy reading it and find its message empowering.

The focus of this paper is to explore Zora Neale Hurston’s “Their Eyes were Watching God” as a womanist text, considering how she humanizes African-American women and black female sexuality by representing a woman’s spiritual journey of self-actualization, selfhood and freedom to be completely normal through beautiful correlation of Janie’s experiences, growth and development with nature. Zora made her a protagonist who defies all the stereotypical images (jezebel, the mule, mammy and tragic mulatto.) and is not afraid to make her own choices, move on and is always willing to try again and again in terms of her marriages, way of living and life as a whole which inspires us to strive to earn or find the happiness we deserve without giving up. Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mothers’ Lost Gardens* will be required for the womanist theories and standpoints while looking at Hurston’s history and text to understand how Janie was made more human, a woman who did not suppress men but walked and worked alongside them to

prosper and coexist in the society, which makes *Their Eyes were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, an amazing womanist text enriched with quintessential African-American culture, language and traditions.

Chapter 2: Research Question and Methodology

This thesis is based on a qualitative investigation of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* using womanist theories and perspectives with reference to Alice Walker's womanist prose collection *In Search of Our Mothers' Lost Gardens* (). The background and rise of the feminist movements along with its distinction from womanist theories are discussed in detail in the "Literature Review" section below. Moreover, references to various womanist articles and theories are used in the chapters below while answering these research questions: How did Hurston represent black culture, community and traditions in her text? What did the possible metaphors of 'pear tree', 'road', 'horizon', etc. signify to Janie's journey? Has Janie succeeded in transcending the main four stereotypical images which are of a mammy, mule, jezebel along with mulatto and rise above them? What made Janie grow and evolve from a girl to a woman through her experiences? What were the ways in which Hurston, through the character portrayal of Janie normalized female sexuality, self-hood, and desires of women of color and then tried to uncover the reasons behind Janie's perseverance to strive for love, self-growth and freedom giving chance to marriages and life over and over again? Can Janie distinguish between freedom and bondage? All in all, how Hurston's text, the protagonist and her writing makes her a womanist similar to Walker is needed to be explored. Hence, in order to organize the possible answers to these

questions, the two primary texts along with references from various articles from authentic sources are necessary to be incorporated for it to be a credible and detailed thesis paper.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Historical Background of Feminist movements

The first wave of feminist movements occurred in the UK and the USA during and after World War I (1914-1918). Due to a very long period of the war, women had to come out of their homes and work to keep the economy going. That was when women realized and proved their abilities to be a part of the workforce and the whole system of the country. This was a significant paradigm shift and after the war many women returned to their domestic life and many did not. Women who remained in the manufacturing industry discrimination in terms of very low wages and little to no social responsibilities and roles. This led to the suffrage movement to ensure voting rights of women along with economic right and reproductive control. The women were victimized by body politics and had to control on their own body. Since women give birth and have the power to reproduce, this power was presented as weakness by men so that they get rid of their competition and have all economic, political or other powers on their own. Moreover, with reproduction comes the legitimacy and protection of the child which were used as tools to suppress women which changed at least theoretically in 20th century after the invention of the

contraceptive pills. Even 100 years after the suffrage movement, there are less than 10 female leaders in the world currently with some countries still having anti-abortion laws.

The Second Wave Feminism began in the early 1960s and is still continuing and co-existing with the Third Wave Feminism being concerned with issues beyond suffrage such as: ending gender discrimination and class issues. Since, it addresses class, it is considered a Marxist movement whereas the earlier was mostly American Feminism with liberal humanist approach. The French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir provided a Marxist solution and an existentialist view on many of the questions of feminist criticism by publishing 'The Second Sex' in 1949 where the Lacanian concept of the self with man at the center and woman as the other looms large. Even important religious or main narratives, the story of Adam and Eve for instance, show man as the prime subject created by God and women as just a part of him (Eve was created from Adam's rib) and not even as a separate entity. Prime narratives like this makes the gender discrimination easier.

One of the strongest criticisms of the second wave was that people claimed the second wave to be more concerned with the condition of the upper middle class white women, ignoring the women of colour which is addressed under the third wave which co-exists now with the second wave feminism and urges people to view gender; as a spectrum and respect the diversity and appreciate and understand its beauty (Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theories*). The Third Wave Feminism began as a response to the perceived failures of the second wave distinguishing it from the second wave in issues of sexuality challenging heterosexuality and celebrating sexuality as a means of women empowerment and argue that the second wave's essentialist definition over emphasizes the experiences of the upper middle class white women. The third wave is a post structuralized approach where we need to come out of the concept of binaries of the world and view race, gender, class, etc. as a spectrum accepting the diversity and

beauty of it. We need to let go of our concept of gender normativity which reinforces the idea that all relationships apart from heterosexual ones are abnormal. We also need to stop generalizing the experiences of women of all color and race because in reality a black woman is double marginalized as she is black and also a woman. The third wave feminists tend to use post-structural interpretation of gender and sexuality focusing on micro-politics. The third wave emphasizes the rights of all classes and gender, which gained immense popularity recently due to the contribution of many famous contemporary public figures like Beyoncé. The third wave focuses on the rights of the 'subaltern', a term used by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" which emphasizes that the marginalized should be given a chance to speak and voice out their opinions and the unheard voices are needed to be heard to bring a positive change in the society and the world as a whole. In "Feminism 2000: One Step Beyond", Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak addresses five questions related to feminism: 1) Is patriarchy an outmoded concept? 2) Based on the diversity of women's experiences, does the term 'feminism' have any useful political currency? 3) Do you feel comfortable calling yourself a feminist and to whom? 4) Do you think that now there is a definite new phase of feminism or the third wave? 5) How do you see feminism 50 years on? These are some common questions to feminists which are beautifully handled by her. In another article titled, "Personal Experience, Ideology and Support for Feminism", the authors theoretically discuss the definition of feminism and about the ones who support it and who does not. It also focuses on the impact of gender, personal experience and religion on feminism and Klein's analysis about it. Critics and theorists including Alice Walker, claimed that the third wave neglects the rights of the African-American women only because of their race or complexion and that the feminist movements are mainly focused on the middle class white women, rarely including the women of colour. This limitation of feminism led to the formation of Womanism as an

alternative for the colonized, enslaved and racialized women who did not have any space in Euro-American women's struggle for emancipation, equality, and egalitarian societies.

3.2 Womanist Theory: Walker and other contributors

In *In Search of our Mother's Gardens* by Alice Walker is a crucial text to develop an understanding of the difference between feminism and Womanism. . The article, "What is a Womanist" by Fatema Hayat will be used in explaining Womanism. "Womanist: Alice Walker's term for Black Feminism" by Linda Napikoski, talks about womanist theology and contains four famous womanist quotes. "The Care and the Feeding of the Creative Spirit: Teaching Alice Walker's 'In Search of Our Mother's Garden'" by Terry Martin talks about the challenges faced by the women of colour who try to keep their creativity and spirituality intact even after going through discrimination, oppression and prejudice. Mathew Fike's article titled, "Jean Toomer and Okot p'Bitek in Alice Walker's *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*" is about Walker's womanist prose, her take on Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" and emphasizes on the creativity of the women of colour, despite facing numerous obstacles, how they shine as artists even when they are not allowed to bloom fully. Walker's critical opinion about Jean Toomer choosing to live with the identity of a white man in spite of being a multiracial one, in contrast to the African man Bitek's high attraction towards Ugandan culture was mentioned. Consequently, the transference of heritage by women through oral tradition and its documentation by women like Walker in her text is an important aspect which can be compared with Hurston's usage of folklore and representation of the culture in her community which is another documentation of oral traditions, passed on for generations. In his 1983 article, "Folklore and the Creative Artist: Lydia Cabrera and Zora Neale Hurston, Willis mentioned about how brilliantly Hurston incorporated elements from her culture to her novel due to the love for her people and culture

without having the intention of disrespecting her community (pp. 81-90) . Walker in her Prose collection echoed very similar thoughts regarding Hurston who intended to pay homage to the love and affection of her people by the usage of folklore (pp. 78-85) and even the *Florida Today* writer in his May 2020 report mentioned the same. Also, “In Search of Alice Walker or, Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore” by Valerie Boyd is about the hostility and negligence of Walker’s own locality and not cherishing or respecting her enough even after being such a great and prominent writer only because of her skin colour and race. This can be connected to how Hurston’s text was criticized during her time and how she along with her fame was all lost by the end of her life. Consequently, “Edith Warton’s Gardens as a legacy to Alice Walker” by Mia Manzulli sheds light about how in the essay the writer uses “Gardens” as a metaphor, a cultural symbol, etc. which conveys unique meanings, what it means to a woman writer and how she can have her ' own garden' or a thoughtful, individual mind instead of being confined in the entrapped cage or space of men such as her father. Additionally, “The Character of Womanhood: How African-American women’s perceptions of womanhood influence marriage and motherhood” by Cassandra Charey which focuses on how black women perceive womanhood and how this shape their attitude towards marriage and motherhood. Here interviews of fifteen African-American women aging between 18-55 years were conducted. Their answers were analyzed to understand the meaning of womanhood for 21st century black women and how these answers related to womanhood are shaped by various negative discourses regarding women.

As we move to the possible theories or definition of Womanism, we need to look at the most important contributors of this theory and try to understand their interpretations. Some of the significant womanist or black feminist theorists include Alice Walker (who coined the term),

Barbara Smith, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and a few others. Walker, according to Fatema Hayat, defined womanist as:

Womanish, the opposite of girlish...Being grown up...A black feminist or feminist of colour...A woman who loves other women sexually or/and non-sexually. Appreciate and prefer women's culture, women's emotional flexibility and strength. Sometimes loves individual men sexually and/or non-sexually. (Walker, *In Search 7*) (Hayat, "What is a Womanist").

A womanist according to Walker is also "committed to the survival of the all the people; male and female". Womanists not only fight for gender equality but also against racial- oppression of African-American men and women". In Walker's view, "Womanism is to Feminism as purple is to lavender", her most famous quotation in the award winning novel ; *The Color Purple*, which suggests that she perceives feminism as a component of the wider ideological umbrella of Womanism (Hayat, "What is a Womanist"). In Walker's womanist prose, she focuses on the 'mothers' gardens' which represents not just a physical place but a place for spiritual freedom, creativity, purity and more importantly it is something that a woman of colour can call her own, her individual personal space to bloom, excel and most importantly breathe, and the necessity of this personal space is given a lot of importance in Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own".

In Black Feminist critique Barbara Smith's opinion in her 1979 article, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism", black feminists face the scrutiny and discrimination of white male-female writers and critiques, lack the support of black female critiques (as there are few to none), lack a consistent feminist analysis of Black Women and Black Women lesbian writers who do not have a place in critical schools. She thinks a black feminist approach is essential for studying the existing

negative views on Black Women. Moreover, writings of black women constitutes identify able Literary tradition including historical black traditions and verifications along with the political, social and economic experiences that women face. Smith emphasizes this by referring to the way of Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Margaret Walker and Alice Walker's incorporation of the roots or history of traditional Black female working activities, herbal medicine, midwifery, conjure into the craft and fabric of their writings and tales as an intentional way instead of coincidence to weave and document black culture the way white feminists intensely did since the second wave of feminism. Whites cannot even imagine black women (agents/objects) in these critical approaches to literature. Black women's existence, experience, and culture and the brutally complex systems of oppression which shape these are in the "real world" of white and/or male consciousness beneath consideration, invisible, unknown. Black women go through more than what Black man and White woman do. Smith claims, 'silence' of women is the reason which needs to be broken. She initiates by stating how sad is the fact that many, especially white women have not yet noticed this silence as womanhood, for those represent white womanhood. Blindness is the result of deep racism (Noman, Sayeed, "Barbara Smith Lecture", 2020). There is no proper space and place for Black women in academic sector. They and their works are not even mentioned in journals and books due to their Black/ third world status. The practices and policies in the literary field are in a favorable state for these women. But, Politics of Feminism related to the state of Black Women's Literature suggest that a Black Feminism would create critical space for Black Female Literature, as well as a redefinition of the goals and strategies of the white feminist movement. Barbara Smith hoped to make some connections between the politics of Black women's lives, which are used to refer to their situation and positions as fellow artists. There are reasons that they need Black feminist movement and criticisms. In accordance with Barbara, many books by white women

could not clearly perceived as the cultural manifestation of an oppressed people. It was the second wave feminist movement that established these books as accurate record of life under patriarchal dominance. Smith claims, Black women writers and Black lesbian writers should do the same to validate women's/lesbians' experience studying black women's experience from historical, literary, and political perspectives, which will lead to reduce the confusion and void. For books to be real and remembered and understood, they have to be talked about and be examined respectively. As a consequence of racism Black literature has usually been viewed as a discrete subcategory of American literature. Black Women have no theory for political guidance, no political authority to inspire the field of study and even do not have any political movement to be powerful. Additionally, even if a Black woman's text is studied in this void, it is done in the context of Black Literature, which ignores sexual politics and white women cannot mostly comprehend the subtleties of racial politics. Moreover, black male critiques also overlook works of women of color considering them to be nonexistent and failing to understand black women's experiences in sexual and racial terms. In Contrast, as Smith states, a black feminist is able to prioritize the implications of sex, race and class which is an absolute necessity for present and future black generations.

The possible reasons in Walker's view (Smith 183-94) about why the black woman writer is ignored and not taken as seriously as the black male writer revolves around her gender. Critics seem unusually ill-equipped to intelligently discuss and analyze the works of black women, generally without even making an effort and prefer to talk about their personal lives and lifestyle more than their writings. Also, since they do not worship the idea of male supremacy, they are commented to be cruel. Thus, Smith viewed that, Black feminist criticism would be highly

innovative being constantly aware of the political implications of her work, would owe its existence to a Black feminist movement.

For Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Womanism is a philosophy which celebrates black roots, ideals of black life and portrays Black womanhood which is ideal for black community with the aim of dynamism of wholeness and healing. On the other hand, according to her, Alice Walker's term Womanist means "a woman who is committed to the survival and the wholeness of the entire people, male and female". White feminist writers normalize the usage of words such as 'slaves', 'colonization', 'serfs' 'slaves', 'black minority' in their works, which in reality is not appropriate for the sentiments of the readers, writers, critics and especially the women writers of colour. Black womanist writers need to take into consideration about whether it is necessary for them to join the fight against Euro-American white patriarchy, whether they should choose to fight against racism or sexism first and whether it is right for them to ignore sexism (even racism) within her own community and people. The answers to these questions are complex but these might be some of the possible reasons why black novelists cannot align with the white feminists. For instance, white feminist Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* made Ogunyemi feel like she forcefully made Jane, who can be considered Shakespeare's sister with same potential as him, as 'an eunuch with her own room', the other woman, that is the biracial first wife of Rochester, who ended up in an attic, a 'crazy' woman. This woman's place was taken over by the white woman Jane, whose journey and end were shown to be triumphant, in contrast to the biracial woman's sad journey leading to her tragic ending. Due to the loss of connection, black feminists address the issue of discrimination from other 'positions' [different from white feminists] which defied rigid categories. Her fight is against racial, cultural, national, political and other forms of discrimination along with sexism which hinders her potential as a human being. Black Women aesthetically

identify with each other despite of their differences. They are distinct and diverse compared to white women in terms of race and predominant western hegemonic culture and these issues find expression in black novels and these things also determines why black people respond to social issues differently which shape what is called ' Black Women Aesthetic' , hence they are more appropriately identified as 'womanists' in Ogunyemi's opinion. Womanist theories and movement in South African journalist Beata Lipmann's view is absolutely necessary to address issues above the feminist discourse which subtly demands white female control, portraying black men feminine, weak and unsuccessful, and prioritizing female liberation and sexism ignoring the racist aspect of it. Moreover, Lipmann points out fighting against racism, hunger, poverty, discrimination and dehumanization in one's own community. Lipmann emphasizes that these should be the priority for women of color instead of sexism which is most important for white feminists. This is because white feminist do not need to deal with a lot of additional issues for being racially black as the women of colour face. This makes the womanist movement more complex in comparison to white feminist movement as it tries to address both the issues of race and gender. Also, the view of patriarchy for white and black woman are different. For white women, it means real world power, while it's a domestic affair for the later. The white feminist writers display black suspicion in their works too which does not further appeal the black woman feminist. The feminist Black writers aspire Black and not only female transcendence, wish to serve and contribute to her community alongside men and not ahead of them. Added to that, she shares the additional problems of black man i.e. in getting approval for their intellect, face problems with the language they speak or write, do not get easily published or even readership eligibility. Hence, the separate term ' womanist' is necessary.

Black feminism or womanist thought demands a literature in which “women have pivotal relationships with one another” to achieve a feminine bonding, as a result, arrive at liberation through [their] sisters. It is thus a vehicle of feminist protest to condemn the restrictiveness of bourgeois marriage, exposes intra-racial sexism and discloses male/ domestic violence. More critics including editor Beverly Guy-Sheftall in his 1996 edited review of ' Words of Fire' followed by Jennifer Nash in “Love: Black Feminism, Love Politics and Post intersectionality also talked about Walker’s understanding of Womanism. Even writers of Asian ethnicity Shu-Mei Shih studied and tried to comprehend womanist theory in her article “ Complicities of Western Feminism” and pointed out the issue of how quintessentially western these feminist movements are, similar to the womanist critiques. These Womanist theories, most importantly of Walker can be connected with *Their Eyes were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston to explore the journey of Janie Crawford towards self-discovery and freedom while learning, growing, making her own choices and evolving as a womanist.

3.3 Walker’s “Search for Zora”, Hurston’s Background and Marking of Hurston’s Grave

Before exploring and understanding Janie Crawford, we need to look at the two essays compiled in Walker’s womanist prose collection, “ Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View” and “ Looking For Zora (Walker pp.) , followed by Florida Today news writer Tim Walters’ 24 February 2020 news report, “Zora Neale Hurston Died Alone in 1960. 15 Years later Her Work was Rediscovered and She was called ‘A Genius of the South’”, along with Brickner Norma’s May 2020 article, “How Alice Walker Rediscovered Zora Neale Hurston”, along with Irma McLaurin’s 2012 article “Zora Neale Hurston: Enigma, Heterodox and Progenitor of Black Studies”, along with few others to understand the process of Walker’s journey to rediscover and interpret person Zora, her background, her home town and surroundings.

Enigma refers to a person of puzzling or contradictory character whereas heterodox refers to being different from a traditional form or acknowledge character. In McLaurin's (2012) view Zora Neale Hurston was the epitome of the words ' enigma' and 'heterodox' as she possesses all the qualities of being puzzling, contradictory, while mostly standing in the opposite direction of the conventional standards and these qualities are as crucial to understanding Hurston's character as " sugar is essential to the making of Alabama sweet tea" (Enigma, Heterodox p.1). For instance, the photo in (Figure 4 of Appendix) Zora, during her shining Harlem Renaissance movement era is posing with a cigarette was a very bold picture for a woman of colour in the 1920s as this image with Zora having a book in her lap signifies educated, Black women and the these two adjectives (educated and Black) were considered an oxymoron to many. This also show how deep rooted Zora was in her black roots and was proud of it which might be a result of her childhood in Eatonville which is one of the very few all black town in America unlike the nearby town Goldsboro where Walker met Dr. Benton, who knew Zora from her forties till her last days and even read her works, used to have lengthy discussions confirming her to have beautiful English (Finding Zora, p 19) which Walker understood to be his clever way of denying the claims of the critics who considered her too ' folksy' and rural, demeaning her intellect and work for it. Dr. Benton and his wife even used to invite her for dinner. He was the one who confirmed that Walker died not due to malnutrition but was a healthy and light skinned woman compared to tanned looking Harlem Renaissance era photos, which might be a result of her running back and forth in the scorching sun of South Florida and Eatonville to collect research materials for books as Walker concluded) in her forties to sixties enjoying eating food and ice cream but died due to a stroke in welfare home (Walker, Finding Zora pp. 15-17). She had illness and money issues during old age but never visited her family, not due to strong hate but just because they did not get along. Although

her father, John Hurston, one of the mayors of Eatonville, was a hard working Black Christian man, he was rather conservative in Linda Napikoski's view, who was concerned with Zora when she used to "sit by the porches" and even travelled to places with white passerby people. Zora went to school due to her mother's encouraging attitude and lived in a closely knit black loyal community of Eatonville till she was thirteen when her mother died and she was sent to a boarding school in Jacksonville after her father remarried. Eventually he stopped sending money and her education almost stopped if she had not gone to night school where her college professor recognized her talent and she was accepted in USA's Barnard College followed by graduate studies from Columbia College. Nathiri, (Walters, 2020) understood Hurston as a very committed individual towards education which was a very bumpy and difficult journey which she could pursue and complete in her early 30s due to her perseverance. Hurston's most popular novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was written in 1937, was not appreciated by all the critiques and audience during those times due to its male characters objectifying women or had a sensual black heroine which was not common and she used southern folklore which many found too 'folksy' to be termed as proper literature. On the contrary, Nathiri (Walters 2020) praised her usage of folklore by saying, " She takes the dialect that many people are afraid of and elevates the dialect into lyricism that up until her mode of working with that mode of expression had not achieved the kind of classic beauty that she is able to bestow on it". Despite harsh criticisms from many critics especially Richard Wright and Ralph Emerson among others, still she found some success in 1920s and 1930s while traveling and writing about her own experiences in a small town on Florida's east coast (see Appendix figure 3) followed by a small light green block house of 50/50 feet "squatty with flat roof" in 1734 School Court Street when she had illness due to which she could not think or write too much making her earnings very low and eventually dying and having a

funeral with money raised from locals without having a marked grave due to absence of family members or children (she married and divorced after a short time with no children) as she did not have any. (Walker, Finding Zora pp. 18)

Zora's father was born into slavery who later became free along with her free mother, hence Hurston's roots lying in a place transcending from slavery to freedom is very intriguing. The 1983 Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker, a household name in the African-American community during that time, came across "Their Eyes Were Watching God" and was intrigued to know Zora Neale Hurston, her lost aunt or the grandmother she never had. The novel puts societal patriarchy into challenge through an African-American women's journey of self-discovery. Alice Walker found Hurston's ideas to be contemporary and worthy to be presented to the present and the next generation of readers. She explored the novel and all other available works of Zora Neale Hurston and felt a certain connection and obligation to study more about her and contribute to bring her to light. Hence, to find out more and write about Hurston, Walker with scholar Charlotte Hunt, visited Eatonville, Zora hometown along with its significant places mentioned in her books and even met people who might know about her or remember bits of her being such as Hurston's niece Moseley, her neighbor and friend Dr. Benton, Mrs. Patterson; director of the Lee-Peek Mortuary in Fort Pierce where she was buried and marked her grave in an abandoned field filled with snakes, ants and mud, with a stone she purchased on her own. She went on a great deal to identify her grave. While penning down her thoughts about that experience in the essay, "Looking for Zora", Walker said:

There are times—and finding Zora Neale Hurston's grave was one of them—when normal responses of grief, horror and so on do not make sense because they bear no real relation to the depth of the emotion one feels. It was impossible for me to cry when I saw the field

full of weeds where Zora is. Partly this is because I have come to know Zora through her books and she was not a teary sort of person herself; but partly too, it is because there is a point in which even grief feels absurd. And at this point, laughter gushes up to retrieve sanity. It is only later, when the pain is not so direct a threat to one's own existence, that what was learned in the moment of comical lunacy is understood. Such moments rob us of both youth and vanity. But perhaps they are also times when greater disciplines are born.

(Walker, *Looking For Zora, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, pp.105-106)

Walker finally marked a place hers and inscribed the tombstone with the following words:

Zora Neale Hurston,

“Genius of the South',

1901-1960,

Novelist, Folklorist, Anthropologist”

(Appendix figure 5).

Walker compiled all these along with further research on Zora Neale Hurston in her articles, “Zora Neale Hurston: A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View” and “Looking For Zora” (Walker, *In Search* pp. 78-106). Walker's articles played huge part in the rediscovery of Zora and rekindled interest of researchers to study her works and a man who studied her in late 1970s and 1980s, realized that her works which actually received scrutiny of so many of its own community are now appreciated by many and it actually gave “an in-depth screenshot of what life was like for African Americans in the South in early 1900s” (Walters, 2020). Zora Neale Hurston currently someone more than a national icon. Her hometown celebrates Zora fest in Eatonville since 1990

(marking it her 100th birthday). Although Professor Cherry Abbot argues this to be her 109th birthday (Abbot p. 179) which was mentioned as “Zora Neale Hurston Festival of Arts” in Dorothy Abbott’s 1991 article, *Rediscovering Zora Neale Hurston’s Work* . Hurston is thus not only being made a national pride but also an international literary icon whose text *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is widely, loved and studied by global scholars, critics, students, normal people, especially women, who still find its message extremely empowering.

3.4 Their Eyes were Watching God, Hurston and Critiques

Their Eyes Were Watching God ...

Zora Neale Hurston’s most famous novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which is the story of self-discovery of its African-American female protagonist Janie [Crawford Killicks Starks Woods] who throughout her course of 40-45 years of living, comprehends love and encounters sweet, sour, salty and bitter life experiences, eventually being content with herself and the vivid experiences she had. This text was considered second to Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, which was also released during that time as Walker mentioned in *In Search*, may be because the life of an African American woman living her life and experiencing love and happiness for a brief period and then coming back to her hometown, was very ‘normal’ compared to the politically discursive text of Wright. The book was not well received by the critics and audience at the time of its publication, due to its supposedly touching the sensitivity of the African American culture due to its language, portrayal of oppressive black men, not actively talking about the social issues of racism, discrimination, segregation and politics which were not entirely true. Critics during the time of its publication could not understand the text’s present immediate relevance to modern political thoughts and current events. Alain Locke ‘chastised’ Hurston in his annual *Literature*

review in *Opportunity Magazine*, for creating “those pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh with, weep over and envy” (pp. 167-68). This sarcastic review was milder compared to Richard Wright’s critique where he accused her novel’s likeness to minstrelsy, carrying “no theme, no message, no thought” and functioned only to satisfy the tastes of the white audience for the simple and exotic primitive (Lamothe, pp. 158). They, along with many African American intellectuals got sensitive and were extremely uncomfortable with her portrayal of black culture and men who were oppressive figures. Another critic Michael Awkward followed these critiques and writes in his introduction to *New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God*:

Sensitive to the need to improve White America’s perception of Afro-Americans, some powerful black intellectuals, including Locke and W.E.B DuBois believing that literature represented the most effective means by which to begin to dispel racist notions that Black Americans were morally and cognitively subhuman, insisted that Afro-American writers were obligated to present Afro- Americans in the most favorable—and flattering—light possible (p. 10).

This in Daphne Lamothe’s view was because ‘Hurston positioned herself as an authority on black culture in her lifetime’ and she supposedly practically instigated others to attack her representation of black people and black culture for their lack of legitimacy and authenticity, but as Walker thought, Hurston never intended to portray black people in a disrespectful way, but she loved them immensely is what I connect to more because no one intentionally want people to hate her books or fight with her. Hurston might have believed in Gautier’s “art for art’s sake” artistic theory in contrast to Richard Wright’s where art should always have propaganda and should be a social protest against the privileged white race which is nothing but a very limited Marxist interpretation of art. Hurston might have decided to present her thoughts, characters and writings

differently, where she talked about racism, social discrimination and exploitation, patriarchy but not as blatantly as Wright did but left a lot to the interpretation of the audiences. Thus, Lamothe specified how Locke and Wright were more angry, not due to her authentic representation or rhetoric, but her “seemingly apolitical depiction of poor, uneducated blacks to presumably racist white audience” (p.168). Chord, another contemporary of Hurston accused her of being ‘obsequious towards her supposed superiors’ (Jordan, 106) and this side of Hurston was also acknowledged by Walker for which she forgave her and along with Mary Helen Washington and Robert Hemingway, although viewed Hurston’s weaknesses objectively but maintained their expression of fondness and respect for her talent. But critics such as Jennifer Jordan in her 1998 article, “Feminist Fantasies: Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” strongly claimed that this text ‘does not meet the black feminist demand’(p. 108) but is undoubtedly a significant classic work of black literature and Andrew Delbanco in his 1997 article simply deemed Hurston as “politically incorrect”. But writers such as Walker and Barbara Smith (1978) became pillar of support to Hurston’s work and while the former rediscovered and restored Hurston’s respect in the black literary canon, the former, i.e. Barbara Smith is said to have got deeply interested in Hurston since 1971. She pointed out how critic Turner harshly criticized Zora and called her neither a good writer nor a good anthropologist, but was rather having work which are ‘coy’, “narrow”, “irrational” and “superficial” and called out male critiques such as Nathan Huggins a harsh critique as Hurston never worshipped male supremacy of Black men (Smith, p. 26-27). This shows how Hurston was criticized by her contemporary scholars but her womanist stand was recognized and loved by the next generation critiques following Walker, but the new researchers who studied Hurston since 2000s, have a more complex view on Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* regarding it to be an appropriate model of black Feminism or not. In her 2002

article, “ Rootwork: Arthur Flowers, Zora Neale Hurston, and the ' literary Hoodoo' Tradition”, Patricia R. Schroeder underlines about some positive and negative criticisms from Flowers, Willis, Barbara Johnson, Cheryl Walls, and Michael Awkward, regarding the novel, Janie, and her relationship with Tea Cake. She pointed out how Flowers said Hurston’s novel to be ' a sweet work' but she had problem with the fact that, all three men who are Janie’s husbands die, while “ Janie kills two; one metaphorically through words, and the other literally through gunshot. But he praised the success of Hurston’s storytelling and narration and considered the result of her love plot’s success by the presence of her African-American roots and community, which made her have tremendous spiritual power, and the good representation of that culture. (Schroeder, p. 264). Schroeder further sheds light on how solely considering it a mere love story would be flawed although the love story of the novel cannot be ignored too as Hurston herself considered it a love story and she was inspired by ‘the passion of her lover’ to formulate character as Hurston herself mentioned in her autobiography *Dust Tracks on the Road*”. Moreover, in his 2004 article of Hurston and her iconic text titled, “Some Other Way to Try: From Defiance to Creative Submission in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*”, underlines the issue of this text being primarily a journey towards freedom and her relationship with Tea Cake being considered equilateral, which in Miller’s view is not the case as it was not for Jennifer Jordan. He calls Janie’s behavior towards Logan, to Joe to Tea Cake a journey from “ autonomous defiance to creative submission” and points out the obvious similarities of the treatments of all three husbands towards Janie but how different her reaction was to Tea Cake, because she was willingly giving in due to the sexual pleasures of their relationship along with Tea Cake’s appropriate choice of words and way of saying things without getting on her bad side, even though he means the same as her other husbands. Although part of it is true, that Tea Is also a normal man and not a saint who fell from

the sky to be The Perfect Black Man, but he was the one who made Janie feel and experience the emotion of love, affection and marriage the way she never did before but welcoming her in his community, encouraging her to play, i.e. to participate alongside him and work side by side unlike Logan and Joe. In David Ikard's 2009 article, "Ruthless Individuality and the Other(ED) Black Women in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*", Ikard called Hurston, a definite "trailblazer for black women's empowerment because of her impressive individual achievements and defiance of socially prescribed gender roles" but was critical about her radical individualistic nature and the notion of being self-made. Ikard mentioned about Hazel Carby's article, "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston", and pointed out how Carby attributes "this oversight to white exoticism of black culture, nothing that Hurston's evasive racial politics in *Their Eyes* made her the candidate for white intellectual idolatry" (p. 3) . Similarly, Ikard refers to how William M. Ramsey blames this oversight matter as a result of Hurston's scholars being too busy proving her bashers wrong and their obsession in establishing her as a ' radical black feminist', they glossed over, ingeniously explained or evaded all the troubling problems of the novel in "The Compelling Ambivalence of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" and also points out how Jennifer Jordan blames the black feminists partly for their emotional reading of the text thinking of Janie as a radical individualistic feminist which promoted individuality in such a way that " trivialize the struggles of working class black women" (107). In a comparatively recent 2013 article, " Sites of Resistance: The Subversive Spaces of Their Eyes Were Watching God", Dale Pattison lists the mixed criticisms of critic Carby regarding the novel having 'problematic stylistics' and contradictions (9), followed by Michael Awkward and Deborah Clarke's designation of Janie as a " figure of feminine empowerment" which Pattinson agrees with. Although, he also points out at Miller's argument of

Janie's reception of mistreatments from her husbands and her ability to "engage in critical subversive activity" (p. 9). But his most significant reference is to Péter Szabo's early 2010s work titled, " The Spatial politics of *Their Eyes* and *Jonah's Guard Vine*" to look at the most effective usage of spatial theory in Hurston's writings as his research revolved around these spaces in *Their Eyes*, which Dale Pattison considers to be material, psychological and narrative which enables Janie to challenge existing gender and race discourses and this aspect was overlooked by the critics of Hurston and her novel as they failed to interpret Hurston's expression of marginalization attached to these African American female subjectivities, to provide counter discourse to patriarchy and white supremacy. Patterson suggested that finding and using the "subversive, productive, and potential of heterotopic space enables Janie's growth as a character" which is suggested by Hurston's indication of cultural growth and transformation of the South (p. 11). One thing needs to be clarified that by growth and Transformation of the South, Hurston does not mean a white take over and their way of development of the south, (as even Walker acknowledged in her essay, " Finding Zora Neale Hurston" while talking to a Professor in Eatonville) but rather a development of the rich black south with its culture and resources preserved along with people living in a close knitted communication with unquestionable loyalty towards their black culture, heritage and roots which should be a matter of pride. Although, there are researches done on Hurston's most famous text, but Janie's character and Hurston's intentions while crafting the character and novel is not very straightforward, with very positive or lukewarm or negative or contradictory views which might gradually become clear through more research.

3.5 Additional Study on Hurston's Novel and Her Dynamics with Walker

The article titled, "Critical Legal Thinking- Law and Political-Michel Foucault: Discourse" by Rachel Adams highlights the key logics of Foucauldian discourse and how these are created to

use against the marginalized by the people in power to oppress them or use instances for their own benefits which is very much prevalent in today's patriarchal society. The two articles "Klages on Lacan" and: "The Cognitive Self: The Self Concept" focus on the Lacanian concept of 'Self and the Other', where the first talks about a critical view on Lacan, whereas the second focuses on the mirror stage. After that, "Controlling Images and the Gender Construction of Enslaved African women" by Rupe Simms is used which mainly talks about the four representations of black women who are at two extremes and is considered nothing in between from care giving and nurturing Nanny; who nurtures not her own but white Lady's children and home throughout her life, a mule; who does intense physical labor till she dies followed by jezebel who is infamous for her libido to the final tragic image of a biracial mulatto who is subjected to all kinds of physical and psychological sufferings including rape by her masters to dying tragically. This article also connects with Hurston's view in her novel *Mules and Men*, where black men are the mules of white men but the black men transfer their labor to black women who are the mules of the world since they are mules for both black and white men. Prominent scholar Dianne F. Sadoff, in his 1985 article, "Black Matrilineage: The Case of Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston", tried to study and explore Zora's feeling of connection to Zora as a grandmother or aunt she never had due to similar race and shared cultural history, love for art and nature. The connection was also made by reviewers such as Fagan Churchill and others in the 1990s to now.

Now let us move to the aspect of Hurston's usage of Vodou imagery along with African-American traditions of folklore, speeches and culture which is appreciated by Cathy Brigham in her 1994 article, where she liked Hurston's storytelling, narration and praised her usage of black speech which is an integral part of the culture she belonged to. In the 1999 article, "Vodou Imagery, African-American Tradition and Cultural Transformation in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their*

Eyes Were Watching God” refers to the usage of the voodoo imagery of the Atlantic goddess of love Ezili Freda who is a sensual long haired Goddess, able to make any man her husband similar to Janie, whereas Janie wears blue dress for Tea Cake which is Ezili’s favorite color (157-75) and Lamothe refers to Ellease Southerland’s 1979 essay, “ The Include of Voodoo in the Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston” to quote various descriptions of the goddess and points to support his claims. Moreover, scholar Alice Gambrell in 1997 article, “Serious Fun: Recent Work on Zora Neale Hurston”, focused on the humor of Hurston and by referring to Lowe’s point said that Hurston’s comedy as Lowe said, are matched by his close attention to the cultural and institutional contexts through which her humor developed and was articulated, meaning, Hurston’s comical elements were also inspired from her culture, customs and people. Added to that, Adam Ewing in his 2014 article, ' Zora Neale Hurston and local uses of diaspora' and argued that her “ celebration of roots throughout her literary canon offers provocative and instinctive template for thinking about African diaspora as a conceptual building block for local political action” (pp. 131). Consequently, Jenny Hyst in her 2018 article, “ ' Born with God in the House': Feminist Vision and the Religious Revision in the works of Zora Neale Hurston” explores the originally Baptist born Huston’s relationship with religion, the meaning of spiritually to her as an author and her portrayal of the spiritually aesthetic mind of her protagonist Janie in the novel. Although, scholars and critics debate about *Their Eyes* and Janie being black feminist or not, but there is no doubt about Zora Neale Hurston being the foremother of all the existing womanists.

Chapter 4: Womanist Zora Neale Hurston

Alice Walker; the author who coined the term 'womanist', considers Zora Neale Hurston her role model in her spirituality, in living and considers Hurston a crucial author who advocates for womanist thought about writing. In Alice Walker's writes in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, "Hurston was an auspicious discovery, because every author needs a role model 'in art, in behavior, in growth of spirit and intellect'" (*In Search*, p. 4, Jordan, Jennifer "Feminist Fantasies", p. 105). Alice Walker, in Jennifer Jordan's opinion, feels extremely connected to Hurston due to their shared black and female roots, rebellious, nonconforming nature, love of ideas and art (p. 105). Walker lovingly called the 'cultural awareness' which is evident in Hurston's writings as "racial health; a sense of black people as a complete, complex undiminished human beings" (*In Search*, p. 85) and greatly appreciated this aspect of Hurston's work too along with her intense dedication towards the pursuing of her work and pleasures in life. She found the harsh critiques comments on Hurston, "deliberately belittling, misleading, inaccurate and generally irresponsible attacks". (*In Search*, p. 86).

Significant womanist writer Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's "Womanism: Black Female Novel in English", pointed out some criteria of being a black womanist writer which would help to see which aspects of Hurston's life or famous novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) matches these criteria for us to call Zora Neale Hurston a womanist writer. There are certain things that in Ogunyemi's opinion, are the dos of an intellectual black women or womanist writer. Firstly, she would empower black men in her works or novels which would provide 'interrogated images' of the two words of men and women merging into one. Due to this commitment, a Womanist is mostly unable to be a complete ally of the white feminists who view in suspicion and portray black characters as the marginalized other. A black male character's representation as a feminine and oppressed entity is normalized and white women are portrayed as characters who achieve great

heights and success but by trampling Black men. Hurston, in her novel “Their Eyes Were Watching God” showed how Janie strives to work together with Killicks or participate in speeches or games or festivals with Joe Starks which Killicks and Joe does not let her do as the former wants her to work in the fields in exchange of food mentioning, “no work, no food” (*Their Eyes*, Chapter 4) and Joe silenced her from time to time and even publicly said that “women cannot make speeches or think”. It was Tea Cake who came in the later part of the story, and is a man who invites Jenny to play cards, teach her checkers and other board games and even works alongside her in the Kitchen at times or in the field. This is how Hurston provides the 'interrogated images of the collision of worlds of men and women' that Ogunyemi talked about.

Secondly, the black female writer aspires not just women to transcend but overall Blacks or Black community to transcend collectively and together. In case of Hurston, she did not make Janie choose a better and different place after the death of Tea Cake but rather let her return to her roots, Eatonville. She moved to Logan’s bigger house from Nanny’s place, then runs with Joe Starks to a town where he becomes the mayor and they began to live in a bigger house, which shows materialistic development together. But with Tea Cake, she experienced emotions and passions she never did before, she evolved as a person and Tea Cake, who was a penniless man earlier, had work and earnings after Janie’s entry in his life. Thus, Hurston also showed Black male and female transcending together.

Thirdly, a black intellectuals womanist would share most or almost all problems faced by black males, such as, language in which they write, publication rights, problems for readership, etc. and these are problems unique to blacks which white feminists who not face or share. This point is applicable for Hurston in real life, who was ignored by the white critiques, harshly criticized for the usage of such rural speech in her text (for which she earned praises after being

rediscovered by Walker). Her heroine Janie was not considered as great as Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, or author Charlotte Brontë's heroine Jane Eyre, mostly due to her race, social status and scrutiny from her own local community.

Consequently, patriarchy by white women is viewed as a "Real World Power", whereas for Black women, it is clearly a domestic affair where she strives to work and strive equally together with the man in her family and home. This means that the ultimate difference between a feminist and womanist is their perception or view of power and patriarchy, and their opinions vary regarding the aspects in which patriarchy and power can be changed. Hurston's story focused on Janie having the desire of being equally treated by her husbands, being able to walk and walk alongside them, have the authority to participate in communal games and activities, etc. which fulfils this womanist writer criteria too.

Also, most African-American womanists portray their white characters as cruel or unsympathetic as a reaction to white feminist misrepresentation of black female characters, not giving proper acknowledgement to Black female writers by dismissing them and for the black female writers or womanists in most cases, the problem of racism needs to be addressed and solved prior the issue of sexism. For instance, Mrs. Turner is not a white but biracial character with a white mind, who has black skin, but is wearing a white mask or is thinking like a racist white person and thus is a product of systemic racism. Mrs. Turner is portrayed as a cruel character who have very racist and demeaning sentiments towards racially blacks like Tea Cake and likes to associate herself with light skinned biracial women as Janie. She is married to a white man and is very proud about the fact of whitening the race. She is the character using who Hurston portrayed the social issue of systemic racism and in terms of cruel white women, there is her Nanny's plantation owner's wife who hit nanny and blamed her to give birth of a whiter child than her

instead of doing that to her husband. While Hurston did not criticize the whites in Everglades during her trail and was criticized by many, she definitely criticized oppression, racism, both white men and white women's exploitation of black women in Nanny's story.

Hurston's self-dependent and independent way of life, not letting love relationships or marriages to sabotage her career, and her guts to face the dangers of doing anthropological research in the voodoo temples of Haiti or the violent South turpentine camps, make her a top black feminist candidate, which Jennifer Jordan (p. 106) agrees. Moreover, Jordan thinks, the attitudes, confusions and concerns of modern black feminism is presented appropriately by Hurston, and the portrayal of the political, cultural and sexual needs of women of color reflects Hurston's ambiguity about race, sex, and class. Hurston works in the development of a distinctive female African-American literary voice, which is deeply rooted in her experiences from different African or American places. Although, Paul Gilroy (1993) focuses on Hurston's forgetfulness of showing the African American cultural transformation while presenting the "romanticized folks" (Lamothe, pp. 168), Hurston portrayed the changes of the lives of her characters which are surprisingly not changed by African Diasporic experiences. Hurston also crafted immortal folk characters by capturing the vivacity, reality and the wealthy cultural heritage of black community in Eatonville, where she grew up in. She also provided the message for black women to reduce the desire to be similar to a white middle class woman but to form their own identity. Although, Jennifer Jordan thinks of Hurston to be a significant black female writer, but not a perfect feminist model, Barbara Smith is completely in support of Hurston's black feminist values similar to Walker's. Smith blames sexual politics to be the reason of the contemporary critics' disdain towards Hurston, declaring her contemporary Richard Wright as the father of Black Literature. Moreover, she thinks that even though Hurston was individualistic and conservative, yet her

“insights on sexual politics indicate that she was inherently feminist, a radical stance for a black women in any era” (Smith, “Sexual Politics, pp. 26) . Moreover, Smith further pointed out how the aspect of Hurston’s not being publicly hostile towards white women added to the harshness of the critiques too. Barbara further quotes Larry Neale’s description of Hurston, in his “Introduction to Dust Tracks on a Road” saying:

...One of the most publicly flamboyant personalities of the Harlem literary movement. She was very bold and outspoken—an attractive woman who had learned to survive with native wit. She approached life as a series of encounters and challenges; most of these she overcame without succumbing to the maudlin bitterness of many of her contemporaries. (Smith, Sexual Politics, p. 26-27)

Smith emphasized on the words ' outspoken' and ' bold' in this description about Hurston to point out that she was all these things except of being passive and submissive, which were not expected of African American women of her time. It is a fact that Hurston is the only female women writer of color whose work is associated with the Harlem Renaissance, but it was sexual politics of other white and black critiques alike that made her fame and works almost disappear before being rediscovered by Walker, who was so inspired by her and her love for her people, and way of representing roots and history that Walker even wrote the story of her mother in one of the essays found in her prose collection. Though, she is loved, liked, and hated by critics and her novel’s protagonist Janie’s radical feminist position is debatable, but Hurston is undoubtedly a womanist, may be lagging behind in some aspects compared to the ones that came out after her, but she is the one who sowed the seeds of Womanism in her work and the place of those seeds were recognized and watered by Alice Walker and today’s womanists are enjoying the fruits of that tree

Chapter 5: Janie's transcendence from the Discourses of Controlling Images

Discourse is anything and everything said, discussed, written, speculated and gossiped about a particular topic in a particular time and place based on Michael Foucault's theory. For instance, Amie Cesare in "Discourse in Colonialism" shows how this discourse of white supremacy is formed not in a day, but hundreds of years and European philosophy, anthropology, literature, etc. are fundamentally racist. The discourse of Language is the biggest discourse created to mentally or psychologically colonize the people from a very early age and Lacan even argued that our thoughts or subconscious are not arbitrary but are structured like language. This Lacanian argument was implemented by the British and was directly proposed in Macaulay's "Minutes" for example, where he fabricated a mega plan for the Indians to forget their mother tongue, negate their own culture, consider their roots inferior and become ashamed of themselves and realize their inferiority based on their skin colour, physical features, language, etc. Then comes colonialism and colonization. Amie Cesare in his iconic text "Discourse on Colonialism" defined colonization as a discourse of whites' dehumanizing, subjugating and oppressing the others of their colony. **Colony** refers to a geographical territory ruled by another political power by oppressing the natives and taking their resources for the development of the homeland of the colonizers. By the 17th century, Britain emerged as a political superpower by colonization of not a particular region but most of the world including Africa, Asia, South America, Middle East and India and through their labor and resources earned money, meaning that was the beginning of capitalism which made the

colonists more brutal for money causing their complete degeneration and duality of behavior of being a saint at home and a beast in the colonies and **colonization** as a discourse began before the 16th century and the ideas of white standard of beauty, imperialism, Darwinism, white supremacy had been installed in the minds of the colonized for hundreds of years causing systemic racism or institutional racism which is first coined by Stokely and Hamilton in their 1967 report, "Black Power: The Politics of Liberation" and this theory was further developed by Sir William Macpherson in the 1999 Lawrence report of UK. He identified it as professional and personal discrimination based on skin colour, culture and even ethnicity. Colonization is defined by the colonizers in the dictionary and has some fundamental problems as this ignores or disregards the agency and exploitation of the colonizers and the brutal force that they exerted in the pretext of civilizing us because knowledge is something created through language which have denotative and connotative meanings and the space of interpretation of words provides a place for politics using which the colonizers have led to miseducation of the people of color for years until they begin to forget their own roots and becomes confused and wants to satisfy the white standards or see them through the eyes of the whites similar to Mrs. Turner in Hurston's text, who herself is a biracial woman of colour but is racist and white in thought similar to having a "Black Skin" and wearing "White Masks" taken from the title Fanon's famous "Black Skin, White Masks". For example, Rudyard Killings' in "The White Man's Burden", justified and supported oriental, racist, colonial and imperialistic values. He considered the 'civilization' of the so called savages who were the people of colour to be the burden of whites or 'virtue of whiteness'. Moreover, talking their religion and converting them to Christians will take them towards light from the dark as non-Christians are claimed to be lazy and foolish and must be treated like small children and dealt with in simple language because apparently, the people of colour are not intellectually developed enough to fully

comprehend the European heritage and richness. He further talks about taking their language and culture slowly and govern them with patience and restraint as gradually they will be mentally crippled and will undergo hegemony and willingly try to define or prove themselves through European standards of language, values, complexion, politics and social structures which is a very racist, imperialist and oriental view of Kipling about the people of color which represented the collective white European society and their prejudices against people who are just different but not inferior from them. He also points out that there will be resistance from time to time but these people should be free of the responsibility of governing themselves as the whites are here for it and the governance of the land should be maintained even by the cost of lives lost as a result of cruel world and most importantly, he unapologetically justified landownership of the whites of colonial lands to enjoy luxurious life in the cost of the labor of the people of colour. All these values are very notoriously racist promoting white supremacy, etc. and all these are sarcastically explored and mocked by Mnthali in “The Stranglehold of English Lit”, which serves as a text of counter discourse of language, colonialism, orientalism, white supremacy, etc. Mnthali refers to English literature as ‘a cruel joke...the heart of the alien conquest’, suggesting how language and English literature was used as a tool to gradually Europeanize and physically/ mentally cripple and colonize them, depriving of their language, culture and basic rights and beautifully showed how all these European medium should be rejected to identify, address and accept their problems and find ways to come out of these and re-establish their identity. This mention and protest against colonial discourses began with Edward Said’s article, “Discourses in Orientalism” which inspired many to criticize the racist orientalists, anthropologists and others through their work and also encouraged Black writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and many others to search for their ancient roots, find the glory of their own Heritage and present these aspects beautifully. In this

attempt, Alice Walker even dug out the almost lost African-American gem Zora Neale Hurston and her womanist text *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, where the main character Janie, despite being an African-American woman of colour transcended all the stereotypical images of African or African women of color formed through negative discourses by white supremacist, male chauvinist critiques with colonial mindset. Four such images were described by Rupe Simms in his article, "Controlling Images and the Gender Construction of Enslaved African Women".

The first image is of a Mammy who dedicates all her life serving her masters and taking care of their household chores and children, finding happiness in these and considers her life to be accomplished or successful by living in a corner of the white master's house. Every white household used to keep a mammy as a representation of an ideal black woman and to show people how merciful and generous they are to shelter them. This image matched with the life of Janie's grandmother up until the point of giving birth to Leafy to becoming a free woman to having ownership of her own house; i.e. "her own porch to raise her children" as Black writer Harriet Jacobs always dreamed but failed to have due to the rotten patriarchal and emerging capitalist society as her biographer Jean Fagan Yelling claimed. The second image is of a Mule who is a black woman fated to work forever till death. This would have been true for Janie if she had not make the choice of running away from Logan Killings as he intended to make her toil hard in the field and even said at one point, "no work, no food". This case was metaphorically represented by the actual mule in the story on which Joe Starks took pity on and bought it to make it rest a bit, which is very similar in case of his treatment towards Janie as he did not make her toil in the field but at times let her to take care of the store, but could still have treated her a lot better as it would be discussed in detail below. The third image is of a jezebel who is treated and seen only as an object of desire and is notorious for her libido, roaming naked in front of men at night, etc. Janie

in no way was portrayed this way along with her previous generation women in the text, although the audience and critiques during those times had difficulties to digest the character of the woman of colour Janie, who is sensual, independent, have sexual desires and the autonomy and intellect to choose her partners and way of life from time to time. The fourth is the image of a tragic mulatto who is a biracial enslaved women who always suffer throughout their lives, get raped by masters and eventually dies a tragic death or commits suicide. All these stereotypical images mentioned in this articles were formulated to create a discourse and oppress the victimized enslaved black women even more. The fourth image is very similar to Janie's mother Leafy, who was born out of wedlock as a biracial child from a slave and her master. Although she was out of slavery and even went to school to be educated and defied the fourth image till the point where her supposedly 'place of growth and education' became a place of her violation as she was forcefully raped by her white English teacher. The existing discourses made it exceptionally easy for him to conduct such a nasty thing without feeling a sense of guilt or wrong it. This led Leafy's body and mind to gradually collapse, give unwanted birth at a very young age. She indulged in excessive drinking and suffering to eventually run from the house. We as readers do not exactly know where she is or whether she is alive or not, but her mother, that is, Janie's granny claims her to be breathing as she knows and feels she is doing so while talking to Janie about marriage and Logan Killings. But, Janie is not granny or Leafy. She does not fit into any of these images completely as she chooses to kiss Johnny Tayler at sixteen, chose to not stay with Logan Killicks and tried to find love in Joe Starks and ultimately found a brief period of happiness with Tea Cake by choosing a penniless black man who was ten year, s younger than her which was a very bold thing for Janie to do and Hurston to write during those times. Moreover, Janie was a financially independent woman with her own house, store and money and living her life in her own terms before meeting Tea Cake and

chose to do the same after Tea Cake was gone. She chose to come back to her roots and spent the rest of her days admiring the natural beauty, independent life and thinking about Tea Cake. All these made Janie transcend the stereotypical images of African or African-American women of color created by discourses to promote exploitation, enslavement, dehumanization, colonization, etc. of black women by white men. She lived her life trying to evolve, grow, learn, express, love, choose and live the life of a woman with great experiences, lessons, cherished memories through hard and happy times.

Chapter 6: Janie's Journey from a Girl to a Woman: Towards Self-Discovery and Growth¹

Zora Neale Hurston's most famous novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is viewed as a black feminist or womanist text condemning the restrictions and limitations of marriage, bursts the rosy notions and myths of the concept of love, exposes the intra-racial sexism and racism, sheds light to male domestic violence and wants to see women to take leading roles in serving her community. In this part, we will explore how Hurston normalized female sexuality and desires of a woman of colour through sensual mythical Ezili like Janie and the underlying aspects of racism, along with Janie's journey from a girl to a woman through her experiences with life, love and marriages, her strife for self-discovery and liberation and whether she can distinguish between freed²om and bondage and how much she has evolved.

¹Ezili Freda- referred to the beautiful and flirtatious goddess of love in Haitian Vodou who wears three wedding rings and is believed to have the capacity to entice any man and make him / them her husband.

Janie is shown as a beautiful biracial woman with long, beautiful black hair who Mrs. Turner, is glad to be associated with. Mrs. Turner's character was harsh and racist towards the black people of her own community, looked down and insulted I Tea Cake because of his race, very glad to be married to a white husband and fulfilling the responsibility of "whitening the race" and even instigated Janie to leave Tea Cake for her brother because he is racially 'inferior' to Janie. This is a great example of internalized racism which is seen in people of color blinded by Eurocentric ideas, white supremacy or desiring for "the bluest eyes" like Toni Morrison's Pecola. Through this, Hurston exposes the racial discrimination within one's own race beautifully. Moreover, in Nanny's story of the birth of leafy, the aspects of slavery, racism, rape, violence, etc. is very clear when Nanny said:

"It was de cool of de evenin' when Mistis come walkin' in mah door. She throwed de door wide open and stood dere lookin' at me outa her eyes and her face. Look lak she been livin' through uh hundred years in January without one day of spring. She come stood over me in de bed. "Look lak you don't know who is Mistis on dis plantation, Madam. But Ah aims to show you." " "Nigger, whut's yo' baby doin' wid gray eyes and yaller hair?" She begin tuh slap mah jaws ever which a'way."She kept on astin me:"how come mah baby look white" So Ah told her, 'Ah don't know nothin' but what Ah'm" told tuh do, 'cause Ah ain't nothin' but uh nigger and uh slave.'" first thing in de mornin' de overseer will take you to de whippin' post and tie you down on yo' knees and cut de hide offa yo' yaller back. One hundred lashes wid a raw-hide on yo' bare back. Ah'll have you whipped till de blood run down to yo' heels!! In de black dark Ah wrapped mah baby de best Ah knowed how and made it to de swamp by de river. But nothin' never hurt me 'cause de Lawd knowed how it was (Hurston, *Their Eyes*, pp. 17-18).

Here, we see how Hurston presented the history for African-American women who went through slavery and exploitation for years and faces violence not only from white men but also white women who called out the “ slave girls” like Harriet Jacobs’ “ Linda Brent” instead of their husbands, along with generations of rape that she went through and gave birth to Leafy, and aspired her to be a teacher and be educated and it is this social institution that made her the victim of rape by her own white teacher, which showed how racism, violence and exploitation are still prevalent even after the emancipation and officially abolished slavery. But Hurston is criticized for making Janie not insulting Mrs. Turner more verbally against racial insults, making of a white woman the medium of nanny’s freedom, and making the white panel of judges announce her innocence in the trial and accused her to be pleasing the white audience, but it was possibly a way of Hurston’s trying to convey a message to white women to start thinking from a different perspective and contribute to the black women’s freedom and then the women of color might forgive their generations of atrocities or at least would not harbor resentment or hatred towards white women in their hearts.

Moreover, Hurston portrayed black female sensuality and sexuality in a very organic way through Janie, even referring to descriptions of Janie similar to Atlantic Goddess of love Ezili Freda as critique Daphne argues in his 1999 article, and presents the example of strikingly similar description of Janie’s Eatonville return by Hurston and the goodness Ezili’s entrance in the temple by writer Mètraux, when Lamothe quotes their descriptions one after another. Janie’s description:

The men noticed her firm buttocks like she had grapefruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging in her waist and unraveling in the wind like a plume; then her pugnacious breasts trying to bore holes in her shirt. They, the men, were saving with the mind what they lost with the eye. (Lamothe, p. 162 {Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 2}).

Freda's description:

At last, in the full glory of seductiveness, with hair unbound to make her look like a long-haired half- castle, Ezili makes her entrance to the peristyle. She walks slowly swinging her hips, throwing saucy, ogling looks at the men or pausing for a kiss or a caress (Lamothe, p. 162).

Furthermore, Lamothe writes Freda's description of Alfred Mètraux in his book, *Voodoo in Haiti*, as someone who is "a pretty Antillean half-castell"...a personification of feminine grace and beauty. She has all the characteristics of a pretty mulatto: she is coquettish, sensual, pleasure-loving and ex" (p. 110 {Lamothe, p. 162}). This is a very good example to how one of the instances of Hurston's usage of folks and stories from her culture which was praised and studied in their articles by Patricia R. Schroeder ("Root work: Arthur, 2002) and some other critiques too. But if we think about the goddess, the descriptions are actually undeniably parallel with Janie's complexion, physical description, sensual in the way she views herself with Johnny Taylor and their first kiss, or images of a marriage with Logan for calling Tea Cake 'a bee to her bloom' and uses seasons and many floral descriptions of her evolving as a woman, while the pear tree is a very significant symbol romantically. But Janie did not openly enjoy male attention or publicly displayed her physical affection unlike Freda, but she had parallels of wearing Blue dress for Tea Cake which is Ezili's favorite colour, Janie had three husbands, where she ultimately celebrated her love and sexuality with her relationship with Tea Cake, even if it was short lived, and the way Hurston wrote and portrayed Janie as a desirable for the opposite sex and she could also " marry any man she meets [and likes] and makes her husband" as Ezili could do according to Lamothe (162). Hurston not only included folktales but also description of Eatonville, mention of Jacksonville, and places she lived in along with inspiration for her characters from people in her community such as Joe Clark, one of Hurston's uncles and past mayor of Eatonville who inspired

her to craft the character of Joe Starks which shows how rooted Hurston was in her community, surroundings and nature, talking of which the usage of pear tree The pear tree is very nicely incorporated by Hurston with Janie's, sexuality growth as a women from a child. Hurston writes:

Oh to be a pear tree—any tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world! She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life but it seemed to elude her. Where were the singing bees for her? “She bolted upright and peered out of the window and saw Johnny Taylor lacerating her Janie with a kiss. “Janie”.” That was the end of her childhood (Hurston, *Their Eyes*, pp. 11).

Here we see Janie's unfiltered desires and thoughts openly expressed by Hurston, and how she felt during her first kiss but nanny's scolding and words afterwards, made her feel dirty about the kiss, instead of being a happy memory. But Janie does not give up in making her choices, give love and marriage chances through Logan Killicks, Joe Starks and finally Tea Cake, where Janie celebrates her love, marriage and sexuality, even if it was for a very little time. Many have read or viewed this novel as Janie's quest for love and marriage or as a mission to fulfil her vision of bees or pear tree blossom”. And to understand whether it is the main quest and whether it is a celebration of love, marriage, sexuality and desires of Janie with Tea Cake or not, we need to understand Janie's concepts of love and marriage and her experiences in these which helped her discover herself and grow as a person.

Janie was a naïve happy little girl who did not even know she was not white until the age of six when she realized that her skin color was different from the children she grew up it and this was a big blow or her first understanding that she was “the other” or racially different and looked

down upon by the white society. But, yet she was optimistic about a fairy tale romance love and marriage. When Janie kissed Taylor was an innocent expression close to love without her realization and her concept of love was to be liking her husband naturally after marriage which will end her loneliness. Hurston describes

She was back and forth to the pear tree continuously wondering and thinking. Yes, she would love Logan after they were married. She could see no way for it to come about, but Nanny and the old folks had said it, so it must be so. Husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant. It was just so. Janie felt glad of the thought, for then it wouldn't seem so destructive and mouldy. She wouldn't be lonely anymore... Janie went inside to wait for love to begin. (Hurston, *Their Eyes*, pp. 21)

Janie wanted to “wait, a lil more” before getting married and did not want to marry Logan Killicks at first due to her age and looks but was ultimately persuaded by Nanny as she wanted her to have a better future than herself or Leafy, live and eat comfortably being the lady of the house and a wife as “she is a woman now”. We can decipher that Janie was excited, inquisitive and looking forward to the concept of being married and the experience of it without thinking too much about the outer appearance and personality just before marrying Logan Killicks as Hurston writes:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this

was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid. (Hurstun, *Their Eyes*, pp. 11).

She felt an answer seeking her, but where? When? How? (Hurstun, *Their Eyes*, pp.11).

Janie longed for love and expected marriage to be something which would give her many answers of the questions of life and love but unfortunately, the marriage with Killicks was unsuccessful and loveless, contrary to her expectations. Logan Killicks wanted her to work like a mule and even said “no wood, no food” to her after being “patient” with her for the first year. He even compared her to his first wife and said how bad Janie was in comparison. Her marriage with Killicks shattered her innocent concept of love and marriage to come hand in hand and even mentioned her displeasure regarding this marriage to Nanny by describing how Logan Killicks is the type of man who “never even say nothing pretty”. Janie did not find anything in Killicks attractive, desirable or loveable and complained Nanny and further mentioned about how hard she is trying to “love” him by saying, “Cause you told me Ah mus gointer love him, and, and Ah don’t. Maybe if somebody was to tell me how, Ah could do it.” (p. 23) . Janie clearly mentioned about her heart and her inability to love him inspire of trying too hard, but in return, instead of being sympathetic at least, Nanny broke her bubble of the concept of idealistic love and marriage as well by saying:

If you don’t want him, you sho oughta. Heah you is wid de onliest“Organ in town, amongst colored folks, in yo’ parlor. Got a house“Bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land right on de big road” And...Lawd have mussy! Dat’s de very prong all us black women gits “Hung on. **Dis love!**“ It jus’ makes you sweat. “Ah betcha you wants some dressed up dude dat got to look at de sole of his shoe every time he cross de street tuh see whether he

got enough leather dere tuh make it across. “You can buy and sell such as dem wid what you got. In fact you can buy em and give em away.” (Hurstun, *Their Eyes*, pp. 23)

A very Marxist interpretation of nanny’s words can be that she sold Janie’s happiness as a commodity in exchange of money and land that Killicks had, and did not mind to use her body and labour in exchange of all this. In reality, Logan Killicks and Janie’s relationship was similar to a confinement for Janie that she desperately wanted to escape. But nanny did not support or even understood her emotions to Janie stopped sharing as, “The vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree, but “Janie didn’t know how to tell Nanny that. She merely hunched over and pouted at the floor” (p. 14). Although, she did not say Nanny anything further, she openly expressed her dislike for Killicks to him and even mentioned about the possibility of running away and living him to which Logan was upset, but feigned ignorance of the seriousness of the matter. But, Janie was really serious and she was anticipating for a change and Hurstun foreshadowed the change as such and her shift or growth from a girl to a woman as such:

Janie began to stand around the gate and expect things. “Hat marWhat things? “She didn’t know exactly. Her breath was gusty and short. She knew things that nobody had ever told her. For instance, the words of the trees and the wind. She often spoke to falling seeds and said, “Ah hope you fall on soft ground,” because she had heard seeds saying that to each other as they passed. She knew the world was a stallion rolling in the blue pasture of ether. She knew that God tore down the old world every evening and built a new one by sun-up. It was wonderful to see it take form with the sun and emerge from the gray dust of its making. The familiar people and things had failed her so she hung over the gate and looked up the road towards way off. She knew now riage did not make love. Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman (Hurstun, *Their Eyes*, pp.25).

Here we again see the mention of the gate and road which suggested Janie's boundaries and the new possibilities and that fact that Janie realized love and marriage being completely different things and that she needs to take action and choose between the confinement of Killicks where she is just a substitute to one of his mules or a different life. The chance of a different life was possible due to the entrance of Jody Starks in her life, who was described as a "cityfied stylish dressed man" (p. 27) who considered her to "look like a pretty doll- baby" (p. 29). These show that Janie is now looking for a physically good looking man who she is attracted to and be a person who could say 'pretty things' to her which Logan did not. Janie gave marriage another chance and chose to be with Joe Starks who "wanted to make a wife out of her". It can be said that Janie no longer had to work in the field but have to manage a store and be his trophy wife without having a voice and own opinions as Joe thinks women are not capable of making speeches and men are meant to do the thinking for them. Their marriage was blissful at first, until Joe violated Janie's presence as a person with her own mind, thoughts and wishes. He began to forcefully make her wear 'head rag' symbolizing his control, and he did this due to intense sexual jealousy from other men looking and admiring her beauty and hair. But Janie did not stay silent forever. When Joe insulted about her skills, age and even appearances in front of everyone in the store she answered back and their argument soon resulted into Joe raising his hand in front of everyone and a crack became visually apparent in their marriage from then on. They stopped sleeping or staying together, or much talking and Joe even began to stop eating food cooked by Janie due to the instigation of the noisy neighbors that she might harm his health through her food in any way. Joe even blamed Janie for his sickness and mistreated her but after knowing everything, Janie protested and told Jody about her thoughts on him, his injustices and their marriage, which literally killed him metaphorically and a few moments later he actually dies leaving Janie free and also

financially independent as she had the store to take care of and earn from. The first thing Janie did after Jody's death was burned the head rag which represented her shackles in this marriage with Jodi. She reached her forties and was pleased about her new found freedom and was not thinking of love and marriage until Tea Cake entered the picture. Tea Cake was the first one who invited her to participate in life, ask her to play cards, taught her to play checkers, etc. and many critiques say that it was her journey from worst, to less horrible to best marriage and spouse from Killicks to Woods, i.e. Tea Cake, but this claim is also not supported by critiques such as Jennifer Jordan or Miller who thinks that clearly Tea Cake is the boss in their marriage and as Miller points out, he shows the exact same behavior and signs of control and oppression like Killicks or Logan but can use better words to pacify Janie compared to the other too. It is true that they shared passionate love and Tea Cake made Janie 'feel things like nobody else ever did' and helped her work on the kitchen or fields unlike her other husband, but he actually showed similar pattern of behavior as Killicks or Joe, as he too made Janie work in the field, told her to eat and wear whatever he can afford to buy for her despite having a lot of money in the bank, was sexually jealous and insecure due to Mrs. Turner and her brother and even hit her in front of everyone to "show who is the boss". Alice Walker thinks that it was Tea Cake's hitting of Janie that made Hurston kill him and some critiques say that love is sweet due to obstacles and death is the highest form of obstacle in love and made her marriage and love with Tea Cake immortal, making him a figure that she can idealize, fantasize and think about throughout her life. The claim of Janie and Tea Cake's marriage as a "marriage between two equals" or equilateral as many critiques said is right in the sense that they walked, walked, played and did most of the things side by side as partners where Janie did not need to follow every little thing Tea Cake said and she struck Tea Cake back too to assert her identity but this interpretation has a fundamental problem from radical black feminist perspective

that it takes agency from her and makes her quest for happiness function or work with her relationship with men. It is true that Tea Cake was 'a bee to her bloom' but whether she found freedom and liberation through Tea Cake is a very arguable aspect.

Many think that the main purpose of Janie's journey is to achieve freedom and liberation and she moved actively towards it. But whether she can properly distinguish between freedom and bondage and slowly gave in to the domination as Jennifer Jordan (1988) and Shawn Miller (2004) argued in their articles, is a crucial point to ponder about. We can describe this as Janie's journey from object to subject from a very postmodern perspective, where Janie as a woman was an object in Nanny, Logan and Joe's world but becomes a subject with Tea Cake by participating in life activities alongside him and his invitation to play checkers and teaching it to Janie had a great impact on her as Hurston writes, "He sat to show her and she found herself glowing inside...somebody thought it was natural for her to play (Hurston, *Their Eyes*, pp. 91-92). It is true that Tea Cake welcomed her participation and is viewed liberator in the novel by many, but if it is examined closely, we see how Tea Cake behaved in a very similar way to her previous husbands and did things like taking her money and partying with that money, that too, without her. He mentioned her to wear and eat whatever his money can buy her, making her to wear whatever she liked and even physically assault her. But this time, Janie in Miller's view seemed to be submissive, a woman who protested verbally and silently against Killicks and Joe now gave consent in her domination in Miller's opinion. This aspect is in case of consumers living in a neo capitalist system, who gives consent in their domination unlike in Monopoly capitalist system, where the oppressed were aware and unhappy about being dominated. Thus, whatever is liberating her is becoming her new cage. But it is not true for the end of the story, where Janie choses herself and her freedom over Tea Cake and shot him to death at the climax or climactic scene of the novel.

This scene is very significant in the novel where Janie's move for self-defense was then tried and prove innocent by the court of law and this scene makes us realize Hurston's awareness of Janie's tolerance and gradual submission to Tea Cake. His growing mad due to rabies show that his rage is symptomatic and not anomalous. And the story of Mrs. Tyler along with her visible defiance and protest's consequences of broken marriage with Logan and Joe might made Janie ponder and react in milder way to Tea Cake as she learned to be more submissive due to her experiences and some argue that it is through her submission, she finally gained assertiveness. But Hurston did not let Janie and Tea Cake to be a happily ever after and made Janie shoot him to display her rage against male domination as many justified and even Walker thought that Tea Cake hitting Janie made Hurston feel the killing of Tea Cake justified. Hurston might wanted to show her desire to break free from male domination through Janie by shooting Tea Cake in self-defense, from being confined, dominated and choosing to protect her freedom over him, and this choice of freedom was tried in the court and was not found guilty. Also, many believed that Janie was sexually dependent on Tea Cake which contributed to her willing submissive behavior. What once liberated her (Tea Cake) had also threatened her autonomy, freedom and liberty, hence Hurston takes him away from her, make Janie return to her roots and finally be at peace with herself; her life, her experiences and the person she really is today. But the line, "off course he wasn't dead. Never be dead until she herself finished feeling and thinking" (Chapter 20), makes us think about the possibility of overthrowing / challenging an old system where we were taught to love the aspect of our own exploitation. This is the case for buyers or customers in capitalist system who are systematically taught to give in to their wants even if those are not their needs. This is a very Marxist interpretation of the system. But what makes Hurston womanist and this a womanist text is her constant choices to love and live in her own terms along with the development of herself

and her people and community in a local environment. Hurston, instead of Janie being tied with Tea Cake in “ a happily ever after” made him die which finally gave her someone to think out, idealize, fantasize and reach her romantic fantasy of love but not at the cost of her freedom and selfhood.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis tried to describe the history of feminist movements, its distinction from womanist theory, termed by Walker and further developed by Ogunyemi, Barbara Smith and others. This was followed by the journey of Walker’s rediscovery of Hurston marking the grave of her literary aunt or grandmother who inspired Walker to write about her own mother and think about her roots and culture. Then Hurston’s most famous novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* from a womanist perspective to see Janie’s transcendence from stereotypical controlling images of black women, to Janie’s understanding of marriage, quest for freedom, love and self-hood. To conclude, we can say that although there are arguments about the character Janie and this text being not completely feminist, but in my view this text and Janie are definitely womanist even if these are not radically black feminist or Janie not being the epitome of feminist heroine. Also, Hurston is definitely the foremother who started the womanist thought and touched on many such ideas which were carried forward and completed by Walker, Ogunyemi and other future womanists. More recent research should be done to explore and interpret Tea Cake and Janie’s relationship along with the intensive study of Hurston’s autobiography and other writings to understand Hurston as a writer and her intentions behind her writings better.

Appendix

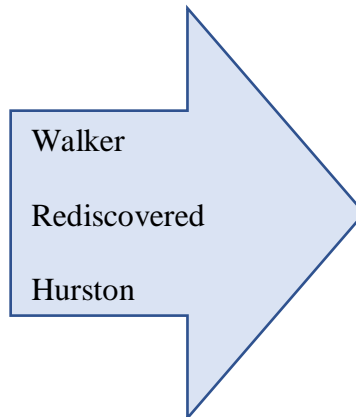


Figure - 1

Alice Walker

Photography: Noah Berger

Figure- 2

Zora Neale Hurston

pictured circa (1950s)

Photography: Corbis

Photo (1 and 2) Courtesy: Florida Today News Article and Web extra



Figure 3: Hurston writing while living in Eau Gallie



Figure4: Zora Neale Hurston

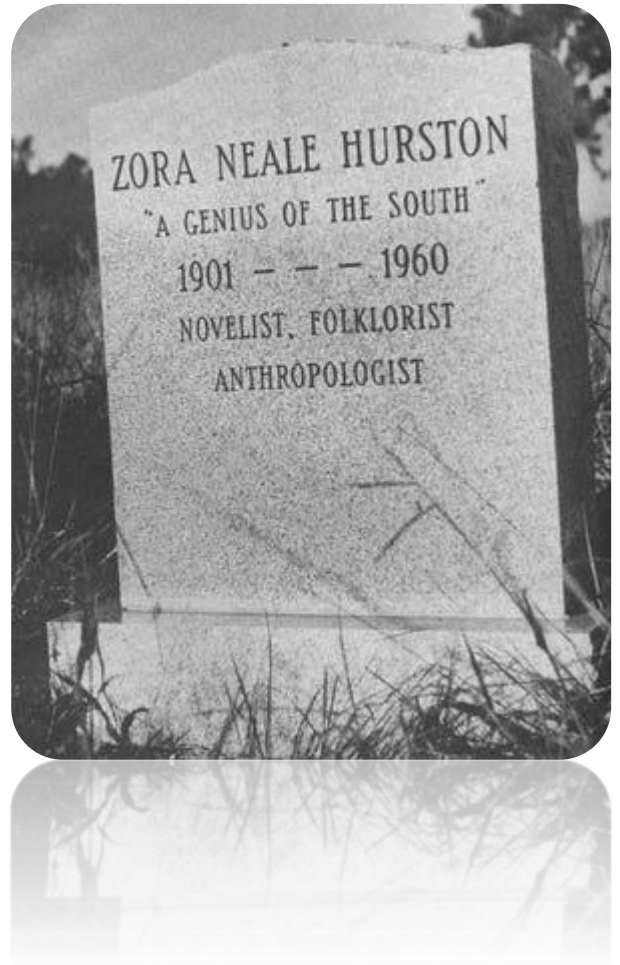


FIGURE 5: Hurston's Grave

Courtesy of the photos: Florida Today News Article and Bing

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